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An

Inaugural Dissertation

on

Amenorrhœa

by

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Philadelphia —

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On Amenorrhœa.

This disease presents the two following varieties -

1st. Emansio ------- Retention of the Menses.
2nd. Suppressio -------- Suppression of the Menses.

By the first we are to understand a failure of the appearance of the menses, when the woman has attained the age of puberty.

By the second is meant the interruption of the action after it has been established, independent of pregnancy and suckling.

It is unnecessary to mention the various theories employed to explain the efficient cause of menstruation, as they can afford no assistance in the present inquiry -

The time in which the secretion, and consequently the flow of the menses commences, varies from many causes; chiefly climate, mode of life, structure

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In a warm climate where the developement of the body is rapid, the period may be accelerated, so that at eight or nine years of age this process may commence, while in the more temperate zones it is usually retarded until the fourteenth or fifteenth, and in the arctic regions 'till the nineteenth or twentieth year.

A delicate girl, debilitated by an indulgence in luxury and indolence, and the sedentary seamstress, or the laborious peasant may equally experience premature developement, or retarded expansion.

Emansio, sometimes may depend upon imperfection of structure— Cases are recorded where it has never taken place; in these, the ovaries or uterus have been found wanting, or but imperfectly developed.

The menses not appearing at the usual period should not always be considered as disease; it should only be looked upon as such, when it creates a disturbance in some functions of the system.

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Should the patient enjoy health, we should wait; lest by inopportune remedies we interrupt the work of nature; still however much anxiety is evinced, and the physician is frequently so importuned by the friends of the patient that he is sometimes under the necessity of employing an innocent stratagem, to prevent mischief from the interference of an incautious practitioner.

We shall briefly state the causes, symptoms, and treatment of the two varieties of the disease under consideration –

Causes. Emansio may be owing to imperfect developement – or to the want of some peculiar stimulus or condition of the uterus though well developed.

Symptoms. This disease usually commences with lassitude and indisposition to motion, or exertion; a failure of animation, or depression of spirits, with a pale or sallow complexion, and when long continued even a cachectic appearance. The functions of the stomach are deranged, and various symptoms of dyspepsia shew themselves;

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such as nausea, heartburn, flatulence &c; the appetite for natural food is diminished and an unaccountable desire for the most innutrient substances, as chalk, lime, charcoal, clay &c supervenes. The respiration is hurried by any quick or laborious motion of the body, with palpitation of the heart, and even syncope. The bowels are often irregular; most frequently inclined however to be constipated — with pains in the head, back, and loins. As the disease advances, the legs and feet become adematous, and at length the serum flows into the cellular membrane of the whole body producing a general anasarca. The pulse is quick and low, with great inactivity in the small vessels, and coldness of the extreme parts of the body. There is also a distressing cough; and so great sometimes that the patient is thought to be on the verge of phthisis, or perhaps to be passing rapidly through its stages.

In the worst degree of this complaint, by a little mucous, or serous discharge perhaps somewhat coloured, nature sometimes changes the scene and gives an

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appearance of returning health; this may recur at distant and irregular intervals, but attended each time, with some amendment of the symptoms, and at last colour, appetite, spirits &c return, and the palid chlorotic girl becomes a blooming healthy young woman.

<u>Treatment</u>. It is fortunate that in this as in many other diseases, concerning the causes of which doubts have existed, we have a more solid basis than that of hypothesis, on which the cure is accomplished - namely <u>experience</u>.

In the disease in question experience has shewn, that those expedients and medicines which restore the strength of the constitution remove the symptoms of the disease - and for this purpose we are to have in view -

1st. The restoring the tone of the system in general.

2nd. The exciting the action of the uterine in particular.

To fulfil the first object, we must resort to regular exercise, proportioned to the ability of the patient - such as jumping the rope, or dancing within doors - riding on horseback, or walking out in

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fair weather – by proper attention to clothing, protecting the feet and legs against cold, and wearing flannel next to the skin – by agreeable society with which are blended novelty of scene, and the still better cordial of cheerful conversation – avoiding cold and damp places – by a light but nourishing diet, proscribing all stimulating and fermented drinks, and indigestible food, both of animal and vegetable kind.

The second indication may be met by general or local stimulants – Of the first class, the Tincture of Cantharides has strong claims on our attention, and appears to be the most efficient, more especially if leucorrhœa aggravate the disease; for it is of primary importance it be removed; nor need we look for the catamenia as long as it remains with any force.

Washing the parts with warm water is very important and must not be overlooked, especially during the continuance of the leucorrhœa.

The influence of the aloetic preparations where leucorrhœa is not an attendant has been long acknowledged,

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Perseverance in the simple plan of treatment just laid down, will rarely fail to bring about the more rapid and permanent establishment of the menstrual flux in the first condition of the system to which we have referred –

In the second condition, or where the most perfect developement exists, and the catamenia are wanting, if leucorrhœa attend we pursue the plan detailed above –

Applications indeed appear to be particularly efficacious when there is an obvious attempt, as it were, in the constitution to effect the discharge. It is, therefore, at those times especially when the efforts of the system are concurring, that we ought to employ the Rubia Tinctorum.

These concurring effects are indicated by the existence of pain in the loins, with a sense of fulness in the region of the uterus, attended sometimes

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Every interruption of the discharge after it has once taken place, is not to be considered as a state of disease; for at its first appearance, it is not always immediately established with perfect regularity, and especially with those who commence very early; this when accompanied with chlorotic symptoms may be deemed a case of retention and treated accordingly.

On the other hand, the discharge may at any period of life, be suppressed from great general debility induced by any cause; and it commonly is thus interrupted when any chronic affection occurs to enfeeble the vital powers –

In such cases, the suppression is merely <u>symptomatic</u> of other affections, and does not itself become an object of medical treatment.

<u>Causes</u>. <u>Cold</u> seems to be the most common source of idiopathic suppression of the Catamenia – the influence

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Symptoms. The suppression seldom continues long, before it is accompanied by various symptoms or derangements in different parts of the system; arising partly from the plethoric condition induced by the suppression of a customary discharge, and partly from the great general sympathy of the whole nervous system, and of several organs in particular with the derangement of the uterus.

It is affirmed by some, that from the first of these causes arise hæmorrhages from various parts as from the brain, lungs, stomach &c when the menses are suppressed; with violent pain in the head, back, or bowels; and at the same time from the nervous sympathy, hysterical and other nervous affections occur, and often to a formidable extent.

Treatment. To control the consequences of a sudden interruption of the menses we resort to bloodletting, purg

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ing, warm bath, camphor, opium, asafatida &c. and for the present are obliged to treat the complaints as if they were independent of such a cause.

In most cases of idiopathic suppression we find a manifest tendency to excessive action – when this is the case, by venesection, purging, low diet we must reduce the pulse to a proper standard, before exhibiting such remedies as shall have a direct influence in inviting her return; and so efficient is the plan as sometimes to require nothing more for the re-establishment of health.

These however not succeeding we may resort to the Rubia Tinctorum, if the conditions in which it was recommended in Emansio be present.

In recent cases if the madder fail, we may try the Tincture of Cantharides having duly prepared the system by bloodletting, purging &c. But it is the volatile Tincture of Guaiacum which has the strongest claims on our attention – a medicine which to use the words of Dr. Dewees, "when exhibited in proper cases has never

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yet failed in our hands – we give it with a confidence we attach to no other medicine for this purpose; for this confidence is the result of very many years experience of its efficacy" –

This great success is attributable to a due preparation of the system, and a steady perseverance in this valuable acquisition to the Materia Medica.